

# Female prisoners seek reform of prison, parole

**State inmates seek change from cells in Louisiana lockup**

By CARLA CROWDER

**Alabama** female prisoners locked in a rural lockup prison are demanding changes they say could give them a fairer shot at parole and curb the state's reliance on private for-profit lockups.

Women at the South Louisiana Correctional Center, some 11 miles from their families, say they have been forced to work 10-hour days, 500 miles from their families for two years, wrote a Platform for Fair Reform. The two-page document includes reasons

for demands: they think would improve their chances for getting parole and leading productive lives.

"We know we've changed, and we can make a difference if we have a chance," inmate Phyllis Richey, 44, who is from Muscle Shoals, said from the Basile, La., lockup where she has been since October.

Because of crowding in state prisons, Alabama so far has paid private companies more than \$12 million to house prisoners in other states.

Objective-parole criteria, which they say could give them a fairer shot at parole and curb the state's reliance on private for-profit lockups.

The prison is run by TCS Corrections, a company that plans to operate Alabama's first private prison.

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## Female prisoners seek reform

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end to the "harmous crime" designation that even some of them from working outside the prison and a chance to face their victims as well as the parole board.

The move to the Louisiana prison, 475 miles from Montgomery, makes it difficult or impossible for families to visit the inmates, said Richey. Surrounded by free fields, the prison has no classes, programs or recreation groups, the opportunities prisoners rely on to show the parole board they have worked to better themselves.

"Down here, the line is not a question, the prisoner is behind the structure. We have nothing over conditions and rules to do. We're basically housed. That's it," said Richey, who helped draft the platform. She is serving a life sentence for murder, which occurred while she was driving drunk.

Also, the board has a year-long backlog of hearings for paroles.

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## Reason for denial

Like Richey, most of the women in Louisiana are serving

long sentences for violent crimes. Many of them have been turned down for parole before.

The board is not required to give a reason for the denial,

which the inmates said leaves them without guidance about what to do better. They want the board to set criteria for granting parole.

Parole Board Assistant Executive Director Cynthia Dillard said the board has rules setting out when parole hearings can be set but no guarantees of parole.

"It's totally discretionary, the board has to believe they are not a risk to reoffend, and they have to not be a financial risk on the state if they're released," Dillard said.

That creates frustration for prisoners who are well behaved, said Lisa Kung, an attorney with the Southern Center for Human Rights, an Atlanta law firm that

represents the inmates. "The parole board they have worked to better themselves."

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For Richey, the most important part of the platform is the chance to face her victims.

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